

Complying with California Water Conservation Mandates



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Governor Brown signed executive order B-29-15 on April 1, 2015 calling for 25% water reduction due to severe drought conditions. The State Water Resources Control Board ("Water Board") shall be responsible for implementing and monitoring these measures. As landlords, investors, and responsible members of society, we have already taken steps to contribute to the cause. Most apartment building owners already have installed low flush toilets, flow restrictors on showers and faucets and repair plumbing leaks when reported. Unfortunately, most apartments are also master metered for water usage and tenants control internal water usage. How can landlords make Tenants see that they need to use less water when the Tenants are not the ones responsible for paying for the water?

In this article we will examine ways to conserve outside and internal water usage and the penalties for over use if your apartment building exceeds the quota imposed by the Water Board. Also, we will discuss separate water metering and RUBS (Ratio Utility Billing System). It may be time for the laws to change along with the times. It may be time for the state to require landlords to charge their Tenants for their water usage based on the number of occupants in a unit.

Back Ground Information

Most apartment buildings have a single master water meter(s) as local water companies prefer to send a single, large water bill to the owner of the building. Sub-metering units is very expensive and was viewed as impractical. Some landlords have sub-metered their units using electronic sensors on intake lines. In most systems, one sensor is required for the hot water line and another sensor is needed for the cold water line. It is costly and not usually used except for large complexes.

Another method is RUBS (Ratio Utility Billing System). RUBS is a method of calculating a Tenant's

utility bill based on occupancy, apartment square footage, number of bedrooms, or some other combination of factors. A Tenant's usage is usually limited to indoor use such as laundry, dishes, showers, toilets, but some units may have outdoor landscaping that is included. For example, one hundred unit apartment building, all two bedroom units and water bill is \$5,000 so each individual tenant would owe one percent or \$50.00 dollars that would be in addition to monthly rent. This method is used by large complexes but not usually by small owners and this will change with much higher water bills. Usually use an outside company to do the billing and collecting. RUBS can also include other utility costs.

Average Indoor Water Usage

The average indoor usage of family of five is 292 gallons per day and outdoor use is 122 gallons per day. Showering, toilet flushing and washing machine are largest users. This is 414 gallons per day or 12,422 gallons per month. Reviewing monthly water bills for comparison with previous months using excel spreadsheet would be good water management tool.

Water Saving Methods

1. Replace existing toilets with 1.6 GPF (check if rebate is available).
2. Replace lawns with synthetic grass, colored pavers or rock. Synthetic grass cost approximately \$2.00 per square foot and another \$3.00 to install. Many local water companies offer \$2.00 per S.F. rebate but you need to apply before starting work and have pictures and drawings before and after. Also note that you should wait until you receive written approval before starting your replacement.
3. Check outside and inside the apartment unit for plumbing leaks (faucets, toilets) every few months. Document these leaks and when they were repaired.
4. Water lawns at night only twice a week and add drought resistant landscaping that uses less water and check and repair sprinkler leaks. Monitor the watering to ensure that there is no runoff. Be careful as most cities have started a water waste hotline that permits neighbors to make complaints against each other.

